

## **SEIZING THE DAY: RESOLUTION IN AND AROUND THE BLACK SEA**

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President Bush's February 2005 meeting with European and Russian leaders represented an attempt to repair relations with each of these governments, with NATO, and with the European Union (EU). While Iraq, Iran, and Israel probably were the main issues in these meetings, recent events in the Black Sea basin provide an enormous opportunity to advance a common Western agenda and even possibly to associate Russia with an extension of the realm of security in Europe. Therefore, the new opportunity for resolving local conflicts in the basin should not be neglected. Because of the enlargement of NATO and the EU, the EU's readiness to begin accession talks with Turkey, and Ukraine's orange revolution, opportunities for enhancing security in the basin, now Europe's immediate frontier, have grown.

Specifically we are referring to the frozen conflicts in Moldova and the Caucasus. Local events have also generated a momentum that could be useful toward this end. Azerbaijan increasingly is raising the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in every international forum it can find. Georgia has proposed a reasonable peace plan for South Ossetia, and Abkhazia and Armenia seek improved relations with the West. Turkey, too, is seeking to improve ties with Armenia to demonstrate its good faith vis-à-vis the EU before accession talks. Finally, Moldova has appealed to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) for an end to what even its pro-Moscow government has called Russian occupation. All these trends can generate a positive dynamism that should move resolution of these conflicts to the top of the regional agenda if the West acts boldly and in unison. While Russia has been hostile to previous efforts at breaking this logjam, if the West could devise a unified agenda, Russia might become more susceptible to its persuasion. It is clear that the frozen conflicts in the Black Sea basin facilitate the spread of terrorism, drugs, gun-running, weapons proliferation, and the illegal contraband of people and goods. Thus their unresolved state contribute significantly to all the pathologies that threaten Russia as much if not more than its interlocutors in Europe. The endemic corruption of Russian and Russian-backed authorities in these areas has fostered the spread of the Chechen insurgency to the North Caucasus with results that were displayed all too tragically at Beslan in 2004. Therefore, a united Western front could become a basis for inducing a change in Russian behavior and thinking about these conflicts.

But even if Russia refuses to contribute to regional stability, there is also an equally large scope for concerted action by both NATO and the EU which they should undertake for their own interests. To ensure a transition to peace in any or all of these

conflicts, it is essential that the local militaries and paramilitaries be subjected to democratic controls of the sort that the Partnership for Peace and Membership Action Plan programs of NATO successfully fostered across Eastern Europe. Similarly, a large field of action exists for the overall socio-economic reconstruction of societies. This is precisely where the EU is excellently placed to act given its extensive experience, internal political mechanisms, and economic resources. If its members are also willing to assume the responsibility, they could launch peace and stability operations in any of the presently conflict-torn theaters in the Black Sea basin. The EU's forces are admirably suited to such an operation and would be more likely than NATO to gain all the parties' confidence.

None of this means that the United States would be absent from the scene. The U.S. European Command (USEUCOM) has long since adopted a new understanding of contemporary security challenges that puts societal and state reconstruction at the forefront of its activities, along with older forms of action such as bilateral or multilateral security cooperation with key strategic partners. USEUCOM could continue its present activities in the Caucasus, expand them as needed, or merge them into a larger multilateral enterprise to facilitate conflict resolution in the Black Sea basin. While the details must be worked out, the "correlation of forces" now favors a concerted Western initiative to reduce the threat of terrorism and proliferation, as well as of other major transnational threats here and to induce Russia's association with such initiatives. The opportunity to orchestrate concerted military-political-economic actions to restore threatened states and reduce what are now recognized universally as the main threats to international security is one that hopefully the United States and its allies and partners will move quickly to seize. For in this part of the world, opportunities that are lost do not return.